

# *East Mountain Teaching*

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## **East Mountain Teaching**

(traditional Chinese: 東山法門;;

pinyin: *Dōngshān Fǎmén*; "East Mountain Dharma Gate")

denotes the teachings of the

Fourth Ancestor Dayi Daoxin,

his student and heir the Fifth

# Ancestor Daman Hongren, and their students and lineage of Chan Buddhism.<sup>[1]</sup>



The buddha reception of Wuzu Temple ("Temple of the 5th Patriarch").

*East Mountain Teaching* gets its name from the East Mountain Temple on the "Twin Peaks" (Chinese: 雙峰) of Huangmei (modern Hubei). The East Mountain Temple was on the

easternmost peak of the two.  
Its modern name is Wuzu  
Temple (Chinese: 五祖寺).

The two most famous disciples  
of Hongren, Huineng and  
Yuquan Shenxiu, both  
continued the East Mountain  
teaching.

## History

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The East Mountain School was  
established by Daoxin (道信  
580–651) at East Mountain

Temple on Potou (Broken Head) Mountain, which was later renamed Shuangfeng (Twin Peaks). Daoxin taught there for 30 years. He established the first monastic home for "Bodhidharma's Zen".

The tradition holds that Hongren (弘忍 601–674) left home at an early age (between seven and fourteen) and lived at East Mountain Temple on

Twin Peaks, where Daoxin was the abbot.

*Upon Daoxin's death [in 651 C.E]. at the age of seventy-two, Hongren assumed the abbacy. He then moved East Mountain Temple approximately ten kilometers east to the flanks of Mt. Pingmu.*

*Soon, Hongren's fame eclipsed that of his teacher.*<sup>[2]</sup>

## Teachings

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The East Mountain community was a specialized meditation training centre. The establishment of a community in one location was a change from the wandering lives of Bodhidharma and Huike and their followers.<sup>[3]</sup> It fit better

into Chinese society, which highly valued community-oriented behaviour over solitary practice.<sup>[4]</sup>

An important aspect of the East Mountain Teachings was its nonreliance on a single sutra or a single set of sutras for its doctrinal foundation as was done by most of the other Buddhist sects of the time.

The East Mountain School incorporated both the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* and the *Mahaprajnaparamita Sutras*.

The view of the mind in the *Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana* also had a significant import on the doctrinal development of the East Mountain Teaching:[5]

*In the words of the  
Awakening of Faith —*

*which summarizes the essentials of Mahayana — self and world, mind and suchness, are integrally one. Everything is a carrier of that a priori enlightenment; all incipient enlightenment is predicated on it. The mystery of existence is, then, not, "How may we*

*overcome alienation?"*

*The challenge is, rather,*

*"Why do we think we*

*are lost in the first*

*place?"*<sup>[6]</sup>

## **Meditation**

There were three main meditation techniques taught by this school. One was a meditation on śūnyatā "emptiness" in which one

contemplates all dharmas of body and mind as empty.

Another practice was the contemplation of some 'ultimate principle', this was associated with the 'one-practice samadhi' (Chinese: 一行三昧; pinyin: *yīxíng sānmèi*) and in some texts such as the *Lengqie shizi ji* is achieved by meditating on a single Buddha. The third technique was the practice of concentrating the

mind on one thing (*guan yi wu*) until the mind becomes fixed in samadhi. The goal of all of these practices was to not be hindered by the stream of thoughts which clouds the mind and allow the practitioner to gain insight into the pure, radiant consciousness in everyone.<sup>[7]</sup>

# Maintaining the One

According to John R. McRae the "first explicit statement of the sudden and direct approach that was to become the hallmark of Ch'an religious practice" first appears in a Chinese text named the *Ju-tao an-hsin yao-fang-pien fa-men* (JTFM, Instructions on essential expedients for calming the mind and

accessing the path), itself a part of the *Leng Ch'ieh Shih TZu Chi* (Records of the Masters of the Lankavatara).<sup>[8]</sup> The Records of the Masters of the Lankavatara is associated with the early Chan tradition known as the "East Mountain School" and has been dated to around 713.<sup>[9]</sup>

This method is named "Maintaining the one without

wavering" (*shou-i pu i*, 守一不移). According to McRae:<sup>[8]</sup>

*...the practical explanation of "maintaining the One without wavering" is that one is simply to contemplate every aspect of one's mental and physical existence, focusing on each*

*individual component  
with unswerving  
attention until one  
realizes its essential  
emptiness or non-  
substantiality. The  
interesting aspect of  
this regimen is,  
paradoxically, its  
apparent  
conventionality.  
Although further*

*examination will reveal significant differences between this and traditional Buddhist meditation practice, the description given so far would apply equally well to the most basic of Mahayana techniques: the insight-oriented contemplation of the non-substantiality of*

*the body. Although this type of contemplation is the common property of virtually all schools of Mahayana Buddhism, its presentation here differs in at least two ways from that found in more traditional texts. First, no preparatory requirements, no moral prerequisites or*

*preliminary exercises  
are given. Instead, one  
moves directly into the  
practice of  
contemplation. Second,  
the technique of  
"maintaining the One  
without wavering" is in  
itself completely  
without steps or  
gradations. One  
concentrates,*

*understands, and is  
enlightened, all in one  
undifferentiated  
practice.*

**McRae further notes that**

*the JTFM makes  
allowance for both  
sudden apperception of  
the Buddha Nature and  
gradual improvement in  
the brightness and*

*purity of the  
concentrated mind...the  
JTFM actually allows  
for a number of  
alternative situations:  
One may achieve  
"bright purity" of mind  
either with or without  
undertaking the  
extended practice of  
"viewing the mind." One  
may also achieve*

*enlightenment either solely through one's own efforts or, conversely, with the aid of a teacher's instruction. The point of these alternatives is that a true teacher must be able to understand which students are best suited for which approach and to teach*

*them differently on the basis of that understanding.*<sup>[10]</sup>

## **Fourth Patriarch Daoxin (四祖道信)**

Daoxin is credited with several important innovations that led directly to the ability of Chan to become a popular religion. Among his most important contributions were:

1. The Unification of Chan practice with acceptance of the Buddhist precepts,
2. The unification of the teachings of the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* with those of the Mahaprajnaparamita Sutras, which includes the well-known Heart Sutra and Diamond Sutra,

3. The incorporation of chanting, including chanting the name of Buddha, into Chan practice.<sup>[11]</sup>

## **Fifth Patriarch Hongren (五祖弘忍)**

Hongren was a plain meditation teacher, who taught students of "various religious interests", including "practitioners of the Lotus Sutra, students of

Madhyamaka philosophy, or specialists in the monastic regulations of Buddhist Vinaya".<sup>[3]</sup>

Following Daoxin, Hongren included an emphasis on the Mahaprajnaparamita Sutras, including the *Heart Sutra* and the *Diamond Sutra*, along with the emphasis on the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*.

Though Hongren was known for not compiling writings and for teaching Zen principles orally, the classical Chan text *Discourse on the Highest Vehicle*, is attributed to him.<sup>[12]</sup>

This work emphasizes the practice of "maintaining the original true mind" that "naturally cuts off the arising of delusion."<sup>[13]</sup>

# Split in Northern and Southern School

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Originally Shenxiu was considered to be the "Sixth Patriarch", carrying the mantle of Bodhidharma's Zen through the East Mountain School. After the death of Shenxiu, his student Shenhui started a campaign to establish Huineng as the Sixth Ancestor. Eventually Shenhui's position

won the day, and Huineng was recognized as the Sixth Patriarch.

The successful promulgation of Shenhui's views led to Shenxiu's branch being widely referred to by others as the "Northern School." This nomenclature has continued in western scholarship, which for the most part has largely viewed Chinese

Zen through the lens of  
southern Chan.

## **Northern and Southern School (南頓北漸)**

The terms Northern and  
Southern have little to do with  
geography:

*Contrary to first  
impressions, the  
formula has little to do  
with geography. Like*

*the general  
designations of  
Mahāyāna ("the  
universal vehicle") and  
Hīnayāna ("the  
individual vehicle"), the  
formula carries with it  
a value judgement.*

*According to the  
mainstream of later  
Zen, not only is sudden  
enlightenment*

*incomparably superior  
to gradual experience  
but it represents true  
Zen — indeed, it is the  
very touchstone of  
authentic Zen.*<sup>[14]</sup>

The basic difference is between approaches. Shenhui characterised the Northern School as employing *gradual teachings*, while his Southern

school employed *sudden*  
*teachings*:

*suddenness* of the  
South, gradualness of  
the North" (Chinese:  
nan-tun bei qian;  
Japanese: nanton  
hokuzen).<sup>[14]</sup>

The term "East Mountain  
Teaching" is seen as more

culturally and historically appropriate.<sup>[15]</sup>

But the characterization of Shenxiu's East Mountain Teaching as gradualist is argued to be unfounded in light of the documents found amongst Dunhuang manuscripts recovered from the Mogao Caves near Dunhuang.<sup>[14]</sup> Shenhui's Southern School incorporated

Northern teachings as well, and Shenhui himself admittedly saw the need of further practice after initial awakening.<sup>[16]</sup>

## **Shenxiu (神秀, 606?-706 CE)**

Yuquan Shenxiu's prominent position in the history of Chán, despite the popular narrative, is recognized by modern scholarship:

*No doubt the most important personage within the Northern school is [Shenxiu], a man of high education and widespread notoriety.*<sup>[17]</sup>

Kuiken (undated: p. 17) in discussing a Dunhuang document of the Tang monk and meditator, 'Jingjue' (靜覺, 683- ca. 750) states:

*Jingjue's Record*  
introduces Hongren of  
Huangmei 黃梅宏忍  
(d.u.) as the main  
teacher in the sixth  
generation of the  
'southern' or 'East  
Mountain' meditation  
tradition. Shenxiu is  
mentioned as Hongren's  
authorized successor.

*In Shenxiu's shadow,  
Jingjue mentions 'old  
An' 老安 (see A) as a  
'seasoned' meditation  
teacher and some  
minor 'local disciples' of  
Hongren.* [18]

Shenxiu wrote a treatise on meditation called the *Kuan-hsin lun* ("treatise on contemplating the mind"). It combines some of the meditation practices

taught by Zhiyi with ideas from the Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana.<sup>[19]</sup>

## Hui-neng (六祖惠能 or 慧能大師)

The story of Huineng is famously worded in the Platform Sutra, a text which originated after Shenhui's death. Its core may have originated within the so-called

Oxhead school. The text was subsequently edited and enlarged, and reflects various Chán teachings.<sup>[20]</sup> It de-emphasizes the difference between the Northern and the Southern School.

The first chapter of the Platform Sutra relates the story of Huineng and his inheritance of the East Mountain Teachings.

# Wider influence of the East Mountain Teachings

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The tradition of a list of patriarchs, which granted credibility to the developing tradition, developed early in the Chán tradition:

*The consciousness of a unique line of transmission of*

*Bodhidharma Zen,  
which is not yet  
demonstrable in the  
Bodhidharma treatise,  
grew during the seventh  
century and must have  
taken shape on the East  
Mountain prior to the  
death of the Fourth  
Patriarch Tao-hsin  
(580-651). The earliest  
indication appears in*

*the epitaph for Faru  
(638-689), one of the '10  
outstanding disciples' of  
the Fifth Patriarch  
Hongren (601-674). The  
author of the epitaph is  
not known, but the list  
comprises six names:  
after Bodhidharma and  
Huiké follow Sengcan,  
Daoxin, Hongren, and  
Faru. The Ch'uan fa-pao*

*chi takes this list over  
and adds as a seventh  
name that of Shen-hsiu  
(605?-706)<sup>[21]</sup>*

## **Faru (法如, 638-689 CE)**

Faru (法如, 638-689) was "the first pioneer" and "actual founder" of the Northern School. His principal teachers were Hui-ming and Daman Hongren (Hung-jen). He was

sent to Hongren by Hui-ming,  
and attained awakening when  
studying with Hung-jen<sup>[17]</sup>

Originally Faru too was credited  
to be the successor of  
Hongren. But Faru did not have  
a good publicist, and he was  
not included within the list of  
Chan Patriarchs.<sup>[17]</sup>

*In an epitaph for  
Shenxiu, his name is*

*made to take the place of Faru's. The Leng-ch'ieh shih-tzu chi omits Faru and ends after Shenxiu with the name of his disciple Puji (651-739). These indications from the Northern school argue for the succession of the Third Patriarch Sengcan (d. 606), which has been*

*thrown into doubt  
because of lacunae in  
the historical work of  
Tao-hsuan. Still, the  
matter cannot be  
settled with  
certainty.*<sup>[21]</sup>

Because of Faru, the 'Shaolin Monastery', constructed in 496CE, yet again became prominent.<sup>[17]</sup> [Faru] had only a brief stay at Shaolin Temple,

but during his stay the cloister became the epicentre of the flourishing Chan movement.<sup>[17]</sup> An epitaph commemorating the success of Faru's pioneering endeavors is located on Mount Sung.<sup>[17]</sup>

## **Baotang Wuzhu**

Baotang Wuzhu (Chinese: 保唐无住, 714-774), founder and abbot of Baotang Monastery

(Chinese: 保唐寺) in Chengdu in Southwest China was a member of the East Mountain Teachings.

**Moheyan (late eighth century CE, 大乘和尚 or 摩訶衍)**

Moheyan (late eighth century CE) was a proponent of the Northern School. Moheyan traveled to Dunhuang, which at the time belonged to the

Ancient Tibetan Empire, in 781  
or 787 CE.<sup>[22]</sup>

Moheyan participated in a  
prolonged debate with  
Kamalashila at Samye in Tibet  
over sudden versus gradual  
teachings, which was decisive  
for the course the Tibetan  
Buddhist tradition took:

*As is well known, the  
fate of Chan [East*

*Mountain Teachings] in Tibet was said to have been decided in a debate at the Samye monastery near Lhasa in c.792-797.<sup>[23]</sup>*

Broughton identifies the Chinese and Tibetan nomenclature of Mohoyen's teachings and identifies them principally with the East Mountain Teachings:

*Mo-ho-yen's teaching in Tibet as the famed proponent of the all-at-once gate can be summarized as "gazing-at-mind" ([Chinese:] k'an-hsin, [Tibetan:] sems la bltas) and "no examining" ([Chinese:] pu-kuan, [Tibetan:] myi rtog pa) or "no-thought no-examining"*

*([Chinese:] pu-ssu pu-  
kuan, [Tibetan:] myi  
bsam myi rtog).*

*"Gazing-at-mind" is an  
original Northern (or  
East Mountain Dharma  
Gate) teaching. As will  
become clear, Poa-t'ang  
and the Northern Ch'an  
dovetail in the Tibetan  
sources. Mo-ho-yen's  
teaching seems typical*

*of late Northern  
Ch'an.* [24]

The teachings of Moheyan and other Chan masters were unified with the Kham Dzogchen lineages {this may or may not be congruent with the Kahma (Tibetan: *bka' ma*) lineages} through the *Kunkhyen* (Tibetan for "omniscient"), Rongzom Chokyi Zangpo. [25]

The Dzogchen ("Great Perfection") School of the Nyingmapa was often identified with the 'sudden enlightenment' (Tibetan: *cig car gyi 'jug pa*) of Moheyan and was called to defend itself against this charge by avowed members of the Sarma lineages that held to the staunch view of 'gradual enlightenment' (Tibetan: *rim gyis 'jug pa*).<sup>[26]</sup>

# See also

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- Rongzom Chokyi Zangpo
- Yuquan Shenxiu
- Mount Wutai

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